

Ready or Not -- Here I Am, Lord!

GENESIS 22:1-14, PSALM 13, ROMANS 6:12-23,
MATTHEW 10:40-42

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10... Ready or not, here I come!

Who remembers Hide 'n Seek from childhood? Didn't it tingle your spine to peer into bushes, look round corners for your hidden siblings or friends? Then suddenly -- ahhh! -- you spot somebody and the race is on back to home base.... Ideally, you arrive first so the other person will be "it" next time, and you can have the equally spine-tingling opportunity to hide, rather than to seek.

The phrase "Here I am" jumped out at me from our Genesis reading... and made me think about Hide 'n Seek, even though the standard phrase in that game is "Here I come," not "Here I am." Bear with me!

This June, we have been following the story of Abraham and Sarah. Due to Trinity Sunday and then National Indigenous Day of Prayer last Sunday, where different readings took precedence, it has been a somewhat disjointed story for us. So I will just briefly fill in the blanks....

On Trinity Sunday we missed the beginning where God calls Abram into relationship, asks him to leave his old life behind and go forth into the unknown, and promises that he, although childless, will become the father of many nations.

Two weeks ago John read to us about Abraham welcoming three visitors and their news that within a year, his wife Sarah is going to have a baby...in her 90s!... and Sarah laughs.

Then last Sunday, after Sarah has given birth to Isaac, the “miracle baby” (whose name means laughter by the way!), the story was about the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. Twelve years earlier, impatient with God’s timing in making Abraham the father of many nations, Sarah had urged Abraham to create a son with Hagar. But now Isaac has arrived ...and off to the desert Hagar and Ishmael go (where God provides for them).

And today Mary read to us the haunting and oh-so-challenging story of Abraham preparing to sacrifice his one and only son.

Even though the writer of Genesis doesn't use this phrase in every part of this story, in essence Abraham has said "Here I am, Lord" -- and what can I do for you today?

And sure enough in today's story when God calls, "Abraham!" Abraham replies, "Here I am."

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, *whom you love*," God says, "and...offer him as a burnt offering"

If that had been me, the future father of many nations, with only one son now in my household, and God gave me this instruction, my reaction would have been ... Say what? Or likely something more colourful! And we can only imagine what Sarah's reaction would have been.

But no, the story doesn't give us any hint of outrage or grief or disbelief. Instead, full of trust, Abraham obeys and heads off for Mount Moriah.

Did you notice that Abraham is just as much "at the ready" for his son ...

In verse 7, Isaac says, "Father!" And Abraham says... wait for it... "Here I am." Then Isaac asks, "...where is the

lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham replies, “God himself will provide the lamb... my son.”

And sure enough just as Abraham is picking up the knife to kill Isaac, he hears ... “Abraham, Abraham!” And Abraham says, “Here I am.” And the angel says “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God” and a ram is miraculously provided for the sacrifice.

It is an amazing story and when we are facing seemingly insurmountable challenges, it is one from which to take courage. It reminds us about TRUST and that no matter what, we can always say “Here I am” because God will provide.

And in our Gospel reading today, Jesus tells us that when we are “at the ready,” to welcome people into our lives, God provides Himself in those people and we are actually welcoming Him. Wow!

Today’s verses are found at the very end of what is known as the Discourse on Mission. Mainly, throughout this chapter, Jesus has been telling his 12 disciples, who he is sending out on their very first mission trip, about what to do, what not to do, how to be His representative. What we

missed last week in this “pep talk” was his prophecy that persecutions were coming their way, his encouragement not to be afraid, and his emphasis on putting God first before everything else.

In Verses 37/38, Jesus says “Whoever loves father or mother...son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Or to phrase it in the positive... put me, put God first.

For me, this echoes the demand made of Abraham.

But am I truly ready to love God more than anything else in my life... to be ready to let go of ice cream (!), beloved church worship just the way I like it, my family, my own life if God is asking me to do so.

Of course, God asks no less of us than he asked of Himself and of His beloved Son in whom He was so well pleased. Jesus, obedient to His Father’s plan, died on a cross ... for us. And because of Jesus’s self sacrifice (no ram caught in the bush to take his place!) we begin to plumb the depths of just how much God loves us.

So when Jesus says to his disciples...to us... “Go out into the world and share the good news of my Father’s love. Times might get tough but don’t be afraid...my love is stronger than your fear. Trust. God will provide”, shouldn’t we jumping up and heading out the door?

And...remember, Jesus says,

“Whoever welcomes you [whether you are a disciple, prophet, a righteous person, or just a “little one” who calls the Elk Valley home] welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. (Matthew 10: 40)

So, Jesus calls each of us to follow Him in two ways -- 1) to put Him first and actively share God’s love no matter what the cost and 2) to be ready to actively welcome Him in whatever form He arrives in our lives.

So this makes me wonder ...

First, *do* I always welcome Jesus? How hospitable am I to God the Father, am I ready with a cool drink for one of his “little ones” on a hot day -- or am I a wee bit fearful of the Spirit’s knock on the door?

Second, am I ready to be found? God is never pushy but He is always seeking us out. “Ready or not, Bruce, Tillie, Celia, Ralph...” God calls. “Here I come!”

Some of us may feel that we are NOT ready enough, not worthy enough to be found by God. Some of us may feel that before we start welcoming God in our neighbour or grandchild or in a stranger, we need to be holier. Some of us may feel that before we imitate Jesus in seeking out the “lost,” those who are wandering or wondering and so very much in need of God’s love, that we need to know our Bible better. Are we really ready for whatever God is asking of us?

But wait --- let’s remember the depth of Abraham’s trust that no matter how difficult the challenge, whether we are ready or not, God will provide.

So, this week, when we hear God calling “Ready or Not, Here I come!”, let us welcome the eternal seeker into our hearts. Instead of hiding, let’s pop out of our comfortable routines, give the Lord a warm and hearty welcome, and answer, “Here I am, Lord, and what can I do for you today?”

(Catherine Ripley)